



1 Montana’s rank, among all 50 states, in the number of both hunters and wildlife watchers per capita

(Source: USFWS)

Tamarack Time

In early fall, one of Montana’s most remarkable tree species announces its presence by lighting up the mountainsides. The tamarack (or, more accurately, the western larch) is the state’s only conifer to change color in autumn. Unlike needles on other softwoods, those of tamaracks lose their chlorophyll this time of year, revealing yellow xanthophyll pigment before dropping to the ground. The needles grow back green each spring.

Look for gold streaks of tamarack stands in the mountains and valleys west of the Continental Divide. Seeley Lake’s Tamarack Festival runs the last week of September, and Bigfork holds a Tamarack Timber Festival in mid-October. ■



You don’t have to be a millionaire to hunt wild sheep in Montana—just incredibly fit and able to spend weeks in the state’s most rugged terrain.

HUNTING

Easy permits, near-impossible sheep

Recent hoopla over the new world record bighorn sheep, discovered at a state park in western Montana, has further fueled interest in Treasure State wild sheep hunting.

Montana offers several options for obtaining a bighorn sheep hunting license: Pony up several hundred thousand dollars to out bid other high rollers for the special “hunt anywhere” license offered during the Wild Sheep Foundation’s annual auction; win the Super-Tag “hunt anywhere” lottery (20,000 to 1 odds); or beat the odds in the 43 regular bighorn sheep district drawings (from about 100 to 1 to 1,000 to 1).

Or you can purchase a permit that’s available to anyone for one of Montana’s five “unlimited” sheep areas. You read correctly. Montana offers some of the nation’s only over-the-counter bighorn sheep hunting permits.

There’s a catch, of course. Actually, there are several.

The hunting districts, in the Gallatin, Absaroka, and Beartooth Ranges just north of Yellowstone National Park, are some of

the most remote, rugged, and inaccessible areas of the northern Rockies. Sheep populations there are sparse, and rams among them are sparser still. Each of the five districts has a quota of just a few rams. When the quota is filled—sometimes just a day or two into the season—the entire district is closed.

Those with experience say that hunting the unlimited areas requires months of planning, weeks of scouting, and extraordinary physical fitness and backcountry skills. On their own hunts, they often spent a week or more without seeing any sheep, or saw only herds with no legal rams.

This is also prime grizzly country.

Still, the hunts are not impossible. Every year a few hunters fill their tags, some with big rams. In 2016, a hunter killed an 8.5-year-old ram in one of the unlimited areas.

Applications for unlimited bighorn sheep licenses permits are due by May 1 (everyone who applies receives one). That gives you eight months to plan, scout, and get yourself fit enough to tackle Montana’s toughest hunt. ■

STATE PARKS

Caverns receive historic recognition

Earlier this year, Lewis and Clark Caverns State Park was listed in the National Register of Historic Places. One of Montana’s most popular state parks, the site was designated as a “district,” meaning that it includes a collection of structures.

The park contains five buildings and eight structures built by the Civilian Conservation Corps between 1935 and 1941, including the visitor center, a beautifully constructed arched granite bridge, stone culverts, the road to the cave entrance, rock-lined hiking trails, and a stone latrine.

Rhea Armstrong, park manager, says her team is proud of the new designation and the historical light it shines on the park. “Ask any of our staff for directions to the old stone outhouse up the hill—the oldest structure in Montana’s entire state parks system—and from there you can walk to the granite bridge. These are two features many people miss when they visit the park,” Armstrong says. ■



The visitor center, bridge, and latrine are part of the newly designated historic district at Lewis and Clark Caverns.



COMMUNICATION

Best in Show

For the second consecutive year, *Montana Outdoors* won first place in the magazine category at the Association for Conservation Information’s awards competition, topping *Texas Parks & Wildlife* and *Outdoor Indiana*.

This is the sixth time in the past 13 years that Montana has been awarded the top prize in the association’s magazine competition.

In addition, *Montana Outdoors* took first place in the wildlife article category for “Green Grazing,” about using cattle to improve wildlife habitat; first place in the general interest article category for “What About the Others?” which examined the challenge of funding nongame fish and wildlife management; and second place in the fisheries article category for “From Banning TNT to Scanning DNA,” a review of Montana fisheries management over the past century.

“A state conservation magazine is only as good as the agency it represents,” says Tom Dickson, editor. “Our continued success reflects the excellence of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks and the integrity and professionalism of the men and women across the state whose work we feature in each issue.”

Formed in 1938, the ACI is a nonprofit organization of communicators working for state, federal, and private conservation agencies and organizations. The awards were announced on August 2 at the association’s annual conference, held this year in Springfield, Missouri. ■



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: CARTOON BY MIKE MORAN; DONALD M. JONES; DENIS LEBLANC; MONTANA STATE PARKS; MONTANA STATE PARKS; MONTANA OUTDOORS; KEVIN LEAGUE